

6 Ideas for Story Time Fun

There are so many ways to spark children's interest and learning. With these simple ideas using well-loved children's books, children (and adults) can use literature to extend their learning even after a story ends. Note that these suggestions will give you a place to start and can lead in many directions, based on children's interests.

Books are perfect for building vocabularies. Take note of any new or unfamiliar words you read in a book, or create a word wall. Make a guess at what it means based on the context of the story or the illustrations. Then look up the word to see if your guess was right.

1. Repetition makes books predictable, and young readers love knowing what comes next.

Books with repeated phrases (Favorites are: *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst; *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin, Jr.; *Horton Hatches the Egg* by Dr. Seuss; and *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper.

2. Short rhyming poems.

Pick a story with repeated phrases or a poem you and your child like. For example, read:

(Wolf voice:) "Little pig, little pig, let me come in."

(Little pig:) "Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin."

(Wolf voice:) "Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in!"

After the wolf has blown down the first pig's house, your child will soon join in with the refrain.

Read slowly, and with a smile or a nod, let your child know you appreciate his or her participation.

As the child grows more familiar with the story, pause and give him or her a chance to fill in the blanks and phrases.

Encourage your child to pretend to read, especially books that contain repetition and rhyme. Most children who enjoy reading will eventually memorize all or parts of a book and imitate your reading. This is a normal part of reading development.

When children anticipate what's coming next in a story or poem, they have a sense of mastery over books. When children feel power, they have the courage to try. Pretending to read is an important step in the process of learning to read.

3. Poetry in motion

When children "act out" a good poem, they learn to love its rhyme, rhythm, and the pictures it paints with a few well-chosen words. They grow as readers by connecting feelings with the written word.

Read a poem slowly to your child, and bring all your dramatic talents to the reading. (In other words, "ham it up.")

If there is a poem your child is particularly fond of, suggest acting out a favourite line. Be sure to award such efforts with delighted enthusiasm.

Ask your child to make a face the way the character in the poem is feeling. Remember that facial expressions bring emotion into the performer's voice.

Be an enthusiastic audience for your child. Applause is always nice.

Mistakes are a fact of life, so ignore them.

Poems are often short with lots of white space on the page. This makes them manageable for new readers and helps to build their confidence.

4. Story talk

Talking about what you read is another way to help children develop language and thinking skills. You won't need to plan the talk, discuss every story, or expect an answer.

Read slowly and pause occasionally to think aloud about a story. You can say: "I wonder what's going to happen next!" Or ask a question: "Do you know what a palace is?" Or point out: "Look where the little mouse is now."

Answer your children's questions, and if you think they don't understand something, stop and ask them. Don't worry if you break into the flow of a story to make something clear. But keep the story flowing as smooth as possible.

Talking about stories they read helps children develop their vocabularies, link stories to everyday life, and use what they know about the world to make sense out of stories.

5. Now hear this

Children are great mimics. When you tell stories, your child will begin to tell stories, too.

Have your child tell stories like those you have told. Ask: "And then what happened?" to urge the story along.

Listen closely when your child speaks. Be enthusiastic and responsive. Give your child full attention.

If you don't understand some part of the story, take the time to get your child to explain. This will help your child understand the relationship between a speaker and a listener and an author and a reader.

Encourage your child to express himself or herself. This will help your child develop a richer vocabulary. It can also help with pronouncing words clearly.

Having a good audience is very helpful for a child to improve language skills, as well as confidence in speaking. Parents can be the best audience a child will ever have.

6. TV

Television can be a great tool for education. The keys to successful TV viewing are setting limits, making good choices, taking time to watch together, discussing what you view, and encouraging follow-up reading.

Limit your child's TV viewing and make your rules and reasons clear. Involve your child in choosing which programs to watch. Read the TV schedule together to choose.

Monitor what your child is watching, and whenever possible, watch the programs with your child.

When you watch programs with your child, discuss what you have seen so your child can better understand the programs.

Look for programs that will stimulate your child's interests and encourage reading (such as dramatizations of children's literature and programs on wildlife and science.)

Many experts recommend that children watch no more than 10 hours of TV each week. Limiting TV viewing frees up time for reading and writing activities.

After reading a book, reflect on the story. What was your favourite part? What would you do if you were in the character's shoes? What do you think happened after the story ended?

Get to know the parts of a book by introducing its cover, back, spine, author, and illustrator. Make sure you show care and respect for books by turning the pages gently from the corner and placing the books in safe spots like baskets or shelves.

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